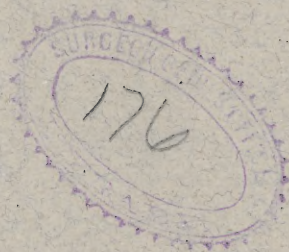


GODDING (W.W.)

THE LAST CHAPTER IN THE
LIFE OF GITEAU.

By W. W. GODDING, M. D.,
Washington, D. C.

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THE LAST CHAPTER IN THE LIFE OF GUTEAU.

By W. W. GODDING, M. D.,

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"FINIS coronat opus," says the old Latin. The Sabbath school books of the last fifty years have made us familiar with the contrasted ends of the truly good and the horribly wicked, the dime novel portrays the calm indifference of the hardened criminal face to face with his doom, but since Bellingham held out his hand under the clear sky that canopied his scaffold, remarking, "I think we shall have rain," we have had but few eminent examples to teach us how a lunatic meets the extreme penalty of the law.

Whatever we may individually believe in regard to the mental responsibility of the great State criminal of our time, the closing acts of his life were, to use the psychological phraseology just now in vogue, sufficiently "out of harmony with his environment" to be entitled to a record in the pages of the ALIENIST.

On the 24th of June, 1882, the spiritual adviser of Guiteau, the Rev. Dr. W. W. Hicks, informed him that all efforts for a respite had failed; that President Arthur had declined to interfere with the execution of the sentence on the 30th of June; that his decision was final, and that nothing remained but to make ready for the event. It was thought best for the criminal to disabuse

his mind of false hopes and thus end the pretense, the bravado which had kept him up so long, and, by so doing, give him time to make serious preparation for eternity. And the whole community experienced a relief at this, they felt that the farce had gone far enough; and keen eyes watched for the "weakening," that, often announced, never came. But still sleep came to him as it comes to a child, his digestion was undisturbed, and to all outward appearance, the sunrise, as it came through the window of his cell on the morning of his execution, was to him the same welcome light that it was when he went to enjoy it in Lafayette Park on the morning of the 2d of July, 1881. If, as he said to Dr. Hicks and saying maintained it to the last, "he had done God's service and had nothing to repent of," he could well be calm. One year before, he had written, "Life is a fleeting dream, and it matters little when one goes. A human life is of small value," and now he was confronted by his own statement. But he really meant this when he wrote it, and he accepted it for himself now. It is too late for me to doubt the sincerity of this man's belief; in his egotism he posed before the world, but he was not playing at a farce with the Almighty. In his religious faith he was as terribly in earnest as John Brown, of Osawatomie, but without the intensity of that old man's devotion.

I think he was most fortunate in his spiritual adviser. Dr. Hicks, having lived a stirring life in both hemispheres, and having been brought in contact with all kinds of men, knew human nature thoroughly. He found Guiteau sincere in his religious belief. He did not claim to be an expert in mental pathology, but that he was in the pathology of sin is undoubted, and when this criminal bared his inmost soul at the confessional, and the Dr. was convinced that he told him the truth, he did not make the mistake that so many divines would have made, of asking him to turn infidel to the religious convictions on which his life had been staked. With such blind faith, what chance was there for him to repent as the

church sees repentance? The pulpit, from the first, had been instant in demanding his execution, and now these Pharisees of "long robes," hearing his blasphemy, gathered up their skirts and fled from him as from one accursed. This clergyman alone, not attempting to convert, was content simply to "hold the cross" even to his dying eyes, not daring to assume to limit the possibilities of the Infinite compassion. If this was not bearing worthy testimony to his Master in the face of a frowning church I do not know what is. To me this is the one bright spot in all this sad business.

Winning Guiteau's confidence, Dr. Hicks had great control over him, and I know was thereby able to prevent some steps he was disposed to take which were at least unwise. For example, Guiteau had conceived a strange fancy to go in robes of white, and determined that he would be hung in his shirt and drawers alone, and could not be dissuaded from this by his friends. Dr. Hicks told him that the doctors would be sure to point to that absurd costume as conclusive evidence of insanity, and Guiteau was so averse to giving any countenance to the idea that he was really insane that he abandoned his project. He said to Dr. Hicks, "If you say I am insane I will believe it, but I believe I am sane. I believe I am God's man, I believe I was commissioned to do this work, and I am no more insane than you are." This was the rock on which he rested, and whatever Dr. Hicks thought, we may be sure he kindly left the word insane unspoken.

But while Guiteau was ready to leave a world that had grown weary of him, he had still something to say as to the manner of his going. This most egotistic of men was not likely to omit his valedictory, or make it less a gala day because he was the chief actor; the drop scene was merely an unavoidable incident that would only heighten the effect. Nor did he propose to conduct the exercises on an empty stomach—he knew the value of a square meal, though he seldom paid for one. So,

after a substantial breakfast, having taken a bath and his usual exercise, both hygienic measures, he sat down to write "Simplicity," a poem! Within the last few weeks of his life, Guiteau had taken to writing poetry (?). I here insert two verses from a mystery published in the *Washington Star* newspaper of June 17th, 1882, which sufficiently illustrate his style. It is entitled "God's Ways."

"Thou Jehovah!
All things created
Save the evil one!
He being uncreated
Like Thyself.
(See my book.)

* * * * *

"The retribution came,
Quick and sharp,
In fire and blood,
In shot and shell,
In endless pain!
Like a jumping tooth,
Lasting forever and ever!
(A jumping tooth
Gives an idea of hell,
And that is what
Those Jews got!)"

The parenthesis in each case lets us down from too dizzy a flight, but I think the world was no more ready for his poetry than for his evangel, "The Truth."

But, to return, there was much to be done that morning that everything should move off right. Time, for him rapidly merging into eternity, made moments precious, but how could the last half hour be more profitably spent than in enjoying a hearty dinner, which he had ordered earlier than usual, having requested Warden Crocker to have the procession move at 12 o'clock M. sharp, he knowing how important it was to be punctual and not keep the invited guests waiting. But this wonderful criminal, forgot nothing; at the eleventh hour he sent out his shoes to be blacked! It will be remembered that the same office was performed for him at the railroad station on the morning of the 2d of July, 1881. This was to be another of his field days, and he went to that plat-

form as to a dress parade. At the first step of the gallows he tripped, and said with a smile to Dr. Hicks, who caught his arm: "I stubbed my toe going to the gallows." And this was the man they expected would "weaken!" How little they knew him.

On the scaffold he stood erect, master of the ceremonies, prepared to conduct his last prayer meeting, assisted by Rev. Dr. Hicks. For twenty years this anomalous being had taken a real pleasure in prayer meetings, it was his privilege to be present at one more. He stood there and looked down into cold, unsympathetic faces, many of them present at a prayer meeting for the first time. But he knew that he was speaking to an audience beyond those dull ears, and that the echoes of his voice would be heard outside the limits of those stone walls which formed his horizon, and past that day's shadows. The clouds of tobacco smoke rolled up like incense from that sensation-seeking crowd; it is but charitable to hope that his prayers rose higher and with a more acceptable savor.

Dr. Hicks, visibly affected, commenced the services with a brief but fitting supplication "out of the depths;" he then held the Bible for the pinioned man to read, and Guiteau, "cool as an iceberg," as the *New York Herald* correspondent remarked, said, so distinctly that his voice filled the corridor and everyone heard him, "I will read a selection from the tenth chapter of Matthew," naming the verses. Then he opened on that motley audience with a Scripture lesson that they well might heed, commencing, "And fear not them that kill the body but are not able to kill the soul," continuing thence for fourteen verses. The *New York Times* correspondent says, "As he read the verses, sometimes looking on the book and sometimes upon the people before him, he seemed to lose sight of the gallows and declaimed the words with great earnestness and much dramatic effect." At that verse which seemed a most precious promise that he applied to himself, "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it," he was eloquent. Then followed that remarkable prayer

which he had written out and had patterned after the seventeenth chapter of St. John. It was delivered in the same firm and, at times, impassioned voice. Then, after a moment's pause, another paper was unfolded before his eyes, and this cool, self-possessed man said, " 'Except ye become as a little child ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.' I am now going to read some verses which are intended to indicate my feelings at the moment of leaving this world. If set to music they may be rendered very effective. The idea is that of a child babbling to his mamma and his papa. I wrote it this morning about ten o'clock." He had come to the most trying part of the whole ordeal, the childish treble was to be assumed, and he was to babble to his Father in heaven some of his fearful verses. He humbled himself, this sane man! and thus became as a little child that so he might enter into the kingdom of heaven. This was his new birth; this was that childhood to which he doubtless thought these verses, when set to music, would hereafter afford an effective entrance for other souls, verses written by Guiteau the martyr, like those old hymns which have come down to us from the early church, hallowed with the blood of the saints, and whose triumphant strains have wafted heavenward many a parting spirit. Here is the hymn that he entitled

"SIMPLICITY."

"I am going to the Lordy, I am so glad.
I am going to the Lordy, I am so glad.
I am going to the Lordy,
Glory hallelujah! Glory hallelujah!
I am going to the Lordy!

"I love the Lordy with all my soul,
Glory hallelujah!
And that is the reason I am going to the Lord.
Glory hallelujah! Glory hallelujah!
I am going to the Lord.

"I saved my party and my land,
Glory hallelujah!
But they have murdered me for it,
And that is the reason I am going to the Lordy.
Glory hallelujah! Glory hallelujah!
I am going to the Lordy!

"I wonder what I will do when I get to the Lordy,
I guess that I will weep no more
When I get to the Lordy!
Glory hallelujah!

"I wonder what I will see when I get to the Lordy,
I expect to see most splendid things,
Beyond all earthly conception,
When I am with the Lordy!
Glory hallelujah! Glory hallelujah!
I am with the Lord."

At last he "weakened," he broke down in his recital, not from fear but from genuine emotion. So real to him were his childish pleadings, that the tears came welling up. For a moment all vindictive feeling was gone, the pride of "God's man" was bowed down, even the egotism disappeared, and he was sobbing like a child as he prattled of the time when he "would weep no more," and the heaven where he should "see most splendid things." Then proudly he remembered he was master of ceremonies still, and his sobs were hushed and his voice rose, as he closed exultantly with "Glory hallelujah! Glory hallelujah! I am with the Lord."

And so the end came. Dr. Hicks pronounced the benediction. Guiteau stood proudly erect while the functionary of the law performed his final offices, and as the quickly drawn cap shut from his eyes the last gleam of our sunlight, those orbs turned to watch for the first dawn of the coming brightness, needing no sun to light it, and, master of ceremonies still, he let fall the paper on which his prayer was written as the signal agreed upon with the warden, and saying firmly, "Glory, ready, go," he went away.

Realizing how intense must have been the gratification to his mind from all this pageant, even though a momentary pang followed, and, knowing how little the insane man considers bodily pain when controlled by his delusions, I was prepared to admit that this had been euthanasia to him, even though I had been unwilling to avail myself of my ticket to witness his happiness.

But when, an hour and a-half later, I stood beside what remained, and saw with what difficulty the dura-

mater was torn away, and was surprised at the ivory whiteness of the brain substance, and remarked of the gray matter how thin some portions were anteriorly, and recognized that familiar, milky opacity of the arachnoid, extending over all the sulci of the superior convexity of both hemispheres of the cerebrum and dipping down into the longitudinal fissure anteriorly, so startlingly like what I had so often seen in the autopsies of chronic mania, I questioned if it would be sufficient explanation for us to make to the public that this appearance was common in drunkards, and had been found in low types of chronic disease other than of the brain, that, indeed, it was often the result of cerebral congestion, and was frequently met with in advanced life; and if none of those conditions seem to exactly apply to Guiteau, to say further that Delafield is not inclined to attach any importance to it, and omit what Foville and Greding and Griesinger, and in short, all writers on the pathology of insanity, have said of its frequency in the chronic forms of mental disease? And, since in the absence of observed lesions of the brain substance under the microscope, we certainly could not claim that mere opacity of the arachnoid proved the existence of insanity in any given case, would it do to boldly claim, in the case of Guiteau, that this thickened, diseased membrane should be accepted as conclusive proof that insanity did *not* exist, that by reason of its thickness it acted as a shield to his brain, even as his winter coat afforded a better protection than his summer duster?

These were puzzling questions then and there; and the more I pondered the evidences of that autopsy, in conjunction with the retrospect of the life thus abruptly closed, the more I felt that it was just possible that the impartial psychological inquirers of the future, studying this remarkable case, might not be so unanimous as we had been in pronouncing this a "happy ending."

NO PHYSICIAN SHOULD BE WITHOUT
THE
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*A Quarterly Journal of Scientific, Clinical and Forensic
Psychiatry and Neurology for the
General Practitioner.*

PROSPECTUS FOR VOL. IV., 1883.

THANKFUL for the encouragement and generous judgments it has received in the past, the ALIENIST AND NEUROLOGIST enters upon another year with a hopeful, and, it is believed, useful future before it. Its subscription list and the number of its contributors and pages have steadily increased since the day of its inception, till now it counts its friends and collaborators in all the States at home and in many countries abroad. It will continue its endeavors to promulgate sound teaching respecting the nature and treatment of the Neuro-Psychic and Nervous diseases.

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